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THE CITY IS A TEACHER.

BY- HOWE, HAROLD, II

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THE PROBLEM OF POVERTY IN THE CITY GHETTO FORMS A COMPLICATED CHAIN OF DISCRIMINATION AND LOST OPPORTUNITIES FOR WHICH ALL AMERICANS PAY. COSTS ARE INCURRED FROM POOR EDUCATION, UNEMPLOYMENT, WASTE OF INDIVIDUAL TALENT, RISING CRIME RATES, MILITARY SERVICE REJECTION RATES, AND OTHER SOCIAL PROBLEMS. THE EDUCATION LINK IN THIS CHAIN IS THE SEGREGATED, INFERIOR SCHOOL. RECENT EFFORTS AIMED AT IMPROVING GHETTO SCHOOLS INCLUDE TITLE I OF THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT AND THE NATIONAL TEACHER CORPS. AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL, THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION HAS BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR ABOUT 100 PROGRAMS. MEASURES FOR IMPROVING THE GHETTO SCHOOL AT THE LOCAL LEVEL SHOULD INCLUDE INCREASED FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND SPECIAL SERVICES SUCH AS COUNSELING AND GUIDANCE, SMALL CLASSES, REMEDIAL INSTRUCTION, AND MEDICAL AID. THE OPPORTUNITY FOR AND EXPECTATION OF PERFORMANCE BY DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN MUST BE CREATED TO FACILITATE THIS GOAL, AND CITY SCHOOL SYSTEMS MUST ADOPT POLICIES THAT WILL GUARANTEE THE ASSIGNMENT OF EXPERIENCED AND SPECIALLY TRAINED TEACHERS TO GHETTO SCHOOLS. A MORE DRASTIC MEASURE WHICH WILL BE NEEDED IS THE ALTERATION OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL BOUNDARIES. RACIAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC SEGREGATION COULD THEN BE BROKEN BY THE CHOICE OF NEW SCHOOL SITES AND BY THE DEVELOPMENT OF CENTRALIZED SCHOOL COMPLEXES. THIS PAPER WAS DELIVERED BEFORE THE ANNUAL CIVIL ASSEMBLY OF THE CITY CLUB OF CHICAGO, CHICAGO BAR ASSOCIATION, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, MAY 13, 1966. (MM)

THE CITY IS A TEACHER*

An Address by Harold Howe II
U.S. Commissioner of Education
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

The city is a teacher, Plutarch said, and everyone who has lived in a city knows why. Within its few square miles of glass, steel, and concrete are concentrated the greatest works of commerce, art, government, and entertainment. Its boundaries -- particularly in the case of the American city, with its roots in a hundred different Nations -- encircle the cultures of an astonishing variety of national, religious, and ethnic groups.

Each of these facets of a city offers its own lesson. But the kind of lesson you learn depends on where in the classroom you sit.

To some of us, the metropolis represents excitement, a sense of being where the action is. The mingled majesty and mystery to be found in a view of the East River, of Capitol Hill, of Michigan Avenue or the Golden Gate remind us that despite the normal quotient of tedium and trial in each of our lives, life in an urban setting can be exciting.

But the metropolis teaches a different lesson to those who sit in the back of the room. Removed from the scenes of splendor, excitement, and romance that beguile the rest of us, they see only the squalid, the depressing, and the dangerous. And they conclude -- rightly -- that the city is a prison.

Jane Addams of Chicago's Hull House called these prisoners "the city's disinherited." They are the Americans who have not shared in the

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great American success story . . . the story that describes how generations of Irish, of Italians, of Germans and Poles labored, prayed, fought, and hoped until they escaped from the immigrants' ghettos to a more generous life.

It is in one way surprising that the Americans in today's ghettos have not completed the trip to Wilmette or South Shore, LaGrange or Lake Shore Drive. For they arrived in the United States decades before many of the other new Americans who have since been naturalized by our melting pot.

I refer, of course, to the American Negro. He was poor, ignorant, and without hope 200 years ago. By modern American standards, he remains poor, ignorant, and without hope today. He was a slave in the South 200 years ago; and he remains a slave to unemployment, to poverty, and to despair in the North today.

I have not come to preach a sermon, for sermons have proven notoriously ineffective in bringing about major changes in society. In any case, I think we must concede that the most effective statements on civil rights in our time have not been made from pulpits, but in the streets of Montgomery and Selma, Watts and a dozen other cities less celebrated in headlines but equally effective as object lessons.

I have come, rather, to discuss the educational aspect of the poverty that flourishes in the inner city; to point out that no matter where you sit in the city's classroom, you pay the tuition for the kind of education it dispenses . . . and whether that education is good or bad, its cost is very high; and finally, to discuss some measures for improving

education in the city ghetto, whether its residents be white paupers or Negro paupers.

In his message to the Congress urging stronger civil rights legislation, President Johnson pointed out that though segregation takes several forms, it nevertheless comprises a sociological unity. He said:

"It is self-evident that the problems we are struggling with form a complicated chain of discrimination and lost opportunities. Employment is often dependent on education, education on neighborhood schools and housing, housing on income, and income on employment. We have learned by now the folly of looking for any crucial link in the chain that binds the ghetto. All the links -- poverty, lack of education, underemployment, and now discrimination in housing -- must be attacked together."

I suspect that most white people feel a generalized sympathy with the Negro in his struggle for equality. They may object to some methods used by the civil rights groups, and even favorably disposed whites probably believe -- after some spectacular incident -- that the Negro is trying to go too far, too fast.

But I suggest that it is a good deal easier to counsel restraint in the attainment of a goal when you have already achieved that goal yourself. Moreover, I believe, every white man has a stake in seeing to it that the Negro progresses just as far as he can, just as fast as he can. For, leaving entirely aside the moral issue and restricting myself to pragmatic matters, I would argue that our experience has shown that every one of us pays in a number of ways to maintain the Negro in his subordinate position.

Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz has estimated that every drop-out costs the Nation about \$1,000 a year while he is unemployed. To this expense must be added the waste of individual talent to the Nation, and the loss of personal income to the individual. We pay for poor education and for poverty in other ways: in crime rates, in military service rejection rates, in social problems springing as much from lack of dignity, lack of hope, and lack of possibilities for family life as from the flawed human nature which we all share.

And such expenses of spirit and matter diminish, finally, the quality of all our lives as citizens of a city . . . a modern city, moreover, whose boundaries do not stop at the red lines on the maps. Delinquency draws no lines at Howard Street. The North Shore pays rent on the South Side slums; like it or not, we all help maintain the chain of poverty that binds the ghetto.

The education link in this chain of social slavery is the segregated, inferior ghetto school.

What are some of the characteristics of the ghetto school? Why is it failing in its mission to shape free, responsible, capable adults from children who have the normal statistical potential for brilliance, mediocrity, and failure?

First, the ghetto school is underfinanced. Contrary to our American oversimplification, the public schools are not free. They are paid for with taxes; they depend first of all on the incomes of the community's adults.

The ghetto community simply does not have the funds to support schools as educators know they should be supported. It is for this reason that cities need special financial assistance from the State taxing power and from the Federal Government.

Further, the children who attend ghetto schools walk in the door suffering from handicaps that do not hinder their counterparts in suburban schools. They come from homes in which their parents read little and write less. Although many of them share the universal culture provided by TV, there is more than a little question of its value, both in content and stimulation.

The educator's jargon for these children is "disadvantaged." The term means that they will start slower than children from middle-class homes and that they will not run as fast. It implies that they will in all likelihood, not pursue their educational journey as far, unless they receive special help.

Third, the ghetto schools usually have the least experienced teachers; other things being equal, one's teaching, like one's tennis or golf or five-card stud, improves as you do more of it.

The reason for this situation is not necessarily planned discrimination by the school board. Often it is simply understandable human preference. As a teacher gains tenure through years of service, he frequently gains the right to ask for another assignment. And it is entirely to be expected that a teacher with this choice would want to serve in the more attractive neighborhoods. Hence year after year, the ghetto schools

must replace vacancies on their staffs with brand-new graduates from the schools of education. It is fortunate indeed that a hard core of able, experienced teachers have made these schools their life work. We need more of them.

Finally, it is characteristic of the ghetto school that it has little community understanding or support. Why should parents -- many of whom are themselves undereducated or even illiterate -- understand what their sons and daughters do every day from nine to three? They are incapable of judging the quality of the education their children receive, even if they are interested in doing so. How can they frame their questions, how can they articulate their hopes and doubts?

They cannot, and the ghetto school continues to limp along without the material and spiritual support that has made some suburban Chicago schools the finest in the Nation.

Why? Is it because the children who attend New Trier township high school are natural geniuses, the happy product of superior genes?

Not at all. It is because they attend a school in a community where adults care about education, and where adults pay for education. And meanwhile, twenty miles to the south, the children of poor whites and poor Negroes in the inner-city schools are being trained for lives of dependency because they did not exercise better judgment in their choice of parents.

One of the finest treatments I have seen of the problems of the ghetto school appeared in the May 7 issue of the New Yorker magazine. The article was mainly an extended interview with Dr. Elliott Shapiro,

principal of a public school in central Harlem. Here is one of the things Dr. Shapiro had to say about the relation between a child's innate ability, his academic performance, and his home environment:

". . . It is after the first grade that the great disparities between our children and the children of the middle class start showing up. As our children grow older, their lives get worse and, simultaneously, their responsibilities increase. They have more younger brothers and sisters to take care of, and their mothers are forced to become more distant as their problems increase. In the fifth and sixth grades, there are more children of broken families than there are in kindergarten and the first grade. It gets harder and harder for the fathers to find employment that will bring in enough money and will also keep their egos intact. And precisely because the fathers do have self-respect, they begin to disappear. I remember that during the Depression, a lot of us didn't know what to do with ourselves. The Negro male in a neighborhood like this is in a permanent depression, much worse than anything we went through in the nineteen-thirties."

What can be done about the ghetto schools?

The Congress of the United States has already made a major start. In the last three years alone, it has passed 24 pieces of legislation touching every aspect of education from pre-kindergarten to post-graduate. One of the most impressive is the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Title I of that Act is aimed specifically at schools in

low-income areas, whether in the city or rural districts. It pumps a billion dollars a year into special educational programs for the children of poverty. It recognizes what school administrators have always known: poverty and ignorance go together. And it is giving them the resources to break up that sad association.

Closely allied in spirit to Title I is a program that we are just now getting off the ground -- the National Teacher Corps. This Corps will be composed of teams of young teacher-interns led by experienced, career teachers. At the invitation of local school systems, and under the supervision of local school boards, they will bring their dedication, talent, and spirit into classrooms that can now afford precious little of any of those commodities. At the end of their service in the Teacher Corps they will be ready for careers among children of the poor.

All in all, the U.S. Office of Education is responsible for about 100 major programs. But not all the education news is taking place in Washington; there are laudable advances at the local level.

Chicago deserves tremendous credit for absorbing a great in-migration of undereducated and relatively unemployable newcomers. I understand that the city has within it more Mississippi Negroes than Mississippi does. The city might well have been stunned by the enormous tasks of housing and educating poor whites and Negroes from the South without the tax losses caused by the exodus of middle class whites.

But Chicago's efforts to serve the children who are harder to serve -- and indeed the efforts of other cities in similar circumstances --

may well be futile unless every citizen accepts this problem as his own . . . especially those citizens who, like the members of this group, are in a position to do something about it.

What can you and your city do about it?

First, we must recognize that the ghetto school needs not just as much financial support as the suburban school, but much more. We must realize that it must provide special services that were considered educational frills just five years ago . . . such services as counseling and guidance; small classes; remedial instruction; the latest teaching methods and equipment; psychological, medical, and dental aid.

We must change inner-city schools from nine-to-three-o'clock citadels where all human life vanishes with the dismissal bell, into highly visible neighborhood resources that teach parents as well as children. The inner-city school must create community where there is no other focal point for a common life and shared interests. We must staff our ghetto schools so that they can remain open from morning to late evening, offering adult instruction in everything from reading to making the most of the shopping dollar.

And in this newly involved institution, we must above all create the opportunity for, and the expectation of, performance by the children of the poor. Cultural disadvantage need not foreshadow poor academic achievement, as Operation Headstart demonstrated. Children sense a school's lower expectations and grow to demand less of themselves because the school demands so little of them. Schools are not custodial. Children are there to learn, not just to be kept off the streets.

They will learn best if they are taught by specially trained teachers. Beyond expressing our national need for more teachers of every description, we have done little to focus upon a kind of teacher preparation which is necessary to serve the children of the poor. In general, our colleges and universities train teachers for ideal classrooms, and although the classrooms in the slums may be in some cases excellent in their buildings and equipment, their human environment cries out for special attention of every kind.

A share of the guilt for this irrelevant teacher education must be borne by the profession itself. Somehow the idea of service to those who need it most has been obscured by the drive for better teaching salaries and conditions.

Further, city school systems must adopt assignment policies that will guarantee slum schools their share of experienced, able teachers. We must counteract the tendency of experienced teachers to choose more pleasant schools as soon as their years of service entitle them to transfer. We must also change the policies of schools and teacher organizations which tend to confront the slum child with the inexperienced, uncertificated and impermanent teacher.

In addition to more and better teachers, slum schools need volunteers and paid teacher-aides to supplement the work of the fully trained teacher. Added personal attention from adults who really care about the child can do as much as any other service to lift the potentialities of the children of the poor.

These are some of the immediate steps that can be taken to improve the ghetto school. But I believe that more drastic measures will be needed over the long run.

For example, traditional school district boundaries often serve education badly and may have to be changed. New York and New Jersey surrendered State prerogatives to form the Port of New York Authority in the interest of improved transportation. If we can make such concessions for transportation, I suggest that we can make them for education.

We could, for example, alter political boundaries to bring the social, economic, and intellectual strengths of the suburbs to bear on the problems of the city schools. Building programs for the future could be planned so that new schools break up, rather than continue, segregation of both the racial and economic sort. The Office of Education will provide Federal planning funds for such efforts right now . . . and, if I have my way, the Office will provide construction funds before long.

We have recently been considering financial support for a comprehensive study of a system of educational parks to be established within the inner city. We visualize each of these centralized school complexes as educational centers that would provide classes ranging from pre-kindergarten through junior college.

And we are particularly interested in finding one or two great American cities that are adventurous enough to join us in planning the educational park of the future. These entities will house 20,000 or more pupils, and will cut across all geographic, economic, and social boundaries to draw students. While such a park would deny the neighborhood

school, it would express the vitality, the imagination, and the cultural mix that every vigorous city exemplifies. Students in such a facility would attend a genuine city school in the deepest sense . . . rather than going to school in one section of the city which is untouched by the broader influences of metropolitan life as a whole.

Altering political boundaries or consolidating the educational facilities of a large city would involve major organizational changes . . . major educational surgery. But I believe that major surgery is required if we are to liberate the children of the slums.

To reach that goal, we will require money; but money is not enough. We will need teachers; but teachers are not enough. We will need research, and educational research is already giving us new teaching techniques, new methods of evaluating academic progress, and a host of additional helps to educate the slum child. But research is not enough.

What is enough?

Perhaps the answer to that question will emerge only when every American recognizes that educating the slum child as a way of breaking the chain of poverty is in his own immediate, direct interest. For this is one of the lessons that your city and all the cities of the United States teach: that, as John Donne said, no man is an island . . . that his well-being, his safety, the very quality of his life and that of his children are bound up with the lives of countless other men whom he will never know and may never see.

The city is indeed a teacher, and it has been teaching us that the ghetto school perpetuates a poverty, an injustice, and a weakness that daily saps all our lives.

It is time we learned our lesson and put it to use.

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